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THE DUBLIN LITERARY GAZETTE,

OR

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[In exhibiting the "lights and shadows" of Irish life, though we have no desire to conceal or to extenuate, unfairly, the faults and vices of our countrymen, we certainly feel no delight in dwelling over much, upon the darker side of the picture. Had the following story been a pure fiction, it would not have gained a place in our pages, but like the tale which we had the pleasure of presenting lately to our readers, and to which this forms so deep and melancholy a contrast, it is unfortunately "a true record." The source from which it is derived satisfies us of its authenticity.

As affording an insight into the habits and secret actions of a very extraordinary set of wretches, some of whom are said even yet to disgrace the wildest parts of the country, it may well be regarded as a curious and interesting relation, and not the less so, that the spirit which animated these miscreants is, we trust, fast dying away, and will soon be known only by remembrance.

It will probably be remarked by the observant reader, that the language of the narrator is not uniform, as the style is raised in some places above what is consistent with the condition of the character described. We are not prepared to say that the descriptions have not sometimes been embellished, and the phraseology occasionally raised, but our ribbonman went to school after his reformation.]

CONFESIONS OF A REFORMED RIBBONMAN. *(An owre true tale.)*

I had read the anonymous summons, but from its general import, I believed it to be one of those special meetings convened for some purpose affecting the general objects and proceedings of the body. At least the terms in which it was conveyed to me; had nothing extraordinary or mysterious in them, beyond the simple fact that it was not to be a general, but a select meeting; this mark of confidence flattened me, and I determined to attend punctually. I was, it is true, desired to keep the circumstance entirely to myself, but there was nothing startling in this, for I had often received summonses of a similar import. I therefore resolved to attend, according to the letter of my instructions, "on the next night, at the solemn hour of midnight, to deliberate and act upon such matters as should, then and there, be submitted to my consideration." The morning after I received this message, I arose and resumed my usual occupations; but from whatever cause it may have proceeded, I felt a sense of approaching evil hang heavily upon me; the beats of my pulse were languid, and an undefinable feeling of anxiety pervaded my whole spirit; even my face was pale, and my eye so heavy, that my father and brothers concluded me to be ill; an opinion which I thought at the time to be correct; for I felt exactly that kind of depression which precedes a severe fever. I could not understand what I experienced, nor can I yet, except by supposing that there is in human nature some mysterious faculty, by which, in coming calamities, the approach throws forward the shadow of some fearful evil, and that it is possible to catch a dark anticipation of the sensations which they subsequently produce. For my part I can neither analyze nor define it; but on that day I knew it by painful experience, and so have a thousand others in similar circumstances.

It was about the middle of winter. The

day was gloomy and tempestuous almost beyond any other I remember; dark clouds rolled over the hills about me, and a close sleet-like rain fell in slanting drifts that chased each other rapidly to the earth on the course of the blast. The out-lying cattle sought the closest and calmest corners of the fields for shelter; the trees and young groves were tossed about, for the wind was so unusually high that it swept its hollow gusts through them, with that hoarse murmur which deepens so powerfully on the mind the sense of dreariness and desolation.

As the shades of night fell, the storm if possible increased. The moon was half gone, and only a few stars were visible by glimpses, as a rush of wind left a temporary opening in the sky. I had determined, if the storm should not abate, to incur any penalty rather than attend the meeting; but the appointed hour was distant, and I resolved to be decided by the future state of the night.

Ten o'clock came, but still there was no change; eleven passed, and on opening the door to observe if there were any likelihood of it clearing up, a blast of wind mingled with rain, nearly blew me off my feet; at length it was approaching to the hour of midnight, and on examining a third time, I found it had calmed a little, and no longer rained.

I instantly got my oak stick, muffled myself in my great coat, strapped my hat about my ears, and as the place of meeting was only a quarter of a mile distant, I presently set out.

The appearance of the heavens was louring and angry, particularly in that point where the light of the moon fell against the clouds from a seeming chasm in them, through which alone she was visible. The edges of this were faintly bronzed, but the dense body of the masses that hung piled on each side of her, was black and impenetrable to sight. In no other point of the heavens was there any part of the sky visible; for a deep veil of clouds overhung the horizon, yet was the light sufficient to give occasional glimpses of the rapid shifting which took place in this dark canopy, and of the tempestuous agitation with which the midnight storm swept to and fro beneath.

At length I arrived at a long slated house, situated in a solitary part of the neighbourhood; a little below it ran a small stream, which was now swollen above its banks, and rushing with mimic roar over the flat meadows beside it. The appearance of the bare slated building in such a night was particularly sombre, and to those like me who knew the purpose to which it was then usually devoted, it was, or ought to have been, peculiarly so. There it stood, silent and gloomy, without any appearance of human life or enjoyment about, or within it: as I approached, the moon once more had broken out of the clouds, and shone dimly upon the glittering of the wet slates and

window, with a death-like lustre, that gradually faded away as I left the point of observation, and entered the folding door. It was the parish chapel.

The scene which presented itself here, was in keeping not only with the external appearance of the house, but with the darkness, the storm, and the hour,—which was now a little after midnight. About eighty persons were sitting in dead silence upon the circular steps of the altar; they did not seem to move, and as I entered and advanced, the echo of my footsteps rang through the building with a lonely distinctness, which added to the solemnity and mystery of the circumstances about me. The windows were secured with shutters on the inside, and on the altar a candle was lighting, which burned dimly amid the surrounding darkness, and lengthened the shadow of the altar itself, and of six or seven persons who stood on its upper steps, until they mingled in the obscurity which shrouded the lower end of the chapel. The faces of those who sat on the altar steps were not distinctly visible, yet the prominent and more characteristic features were in sufficient relief, and I observed, that some of the most malignant and reckless spirits in the parish, were assembled. In the eyes of those who stood at the altar, and whom I knew to be invested with authority over the others, I could perceive gleams of some latent and ferocious purpose, kindled, as I soon observed, into a fiercer expression of vengeance, by the additional excitement of ardent spirits, with which they had stimulated themselves to a point of determination that mocked at the apprehension of all future responsibility, either in this world or the next.

The welcome which I received on joining them, was far different from the boisterous good humour which used to mark our greetings on other occasions; just a nod of the head from this or that person, on the part of those who sat, with a *ghud dhemur tha thu*,* in a suppressed voice, even below a common whisper; but, from the standing group, who were evidently the projectors of the enterprise, I received a convulsive grasp of the hand, accompanied by a fierce and desperate look, that seemed to search my eye and countenance, to try if I was a person not likely to shrink from whatever they had resolved to execute. It is surprising to think of the powerful expression which a moment of intense interest or great danger is capable of giving to the eye, the features, and slightest actions, especially in those whose station in society does not require them to constrain nature, by the force of social courtesies, into habits of concealment of their natural emotions. None of the standing group spoke, but as each of them wrung my hand in silence, his eye was fixed on mine, with an expression of drunken confidence and secrecy, and an insolent determination not to be gainsayed with-

* How are you.

out peril. If looks could be translated with certainty, they seemed to say, "we are bound upon a project of vengeance, and if you do not join us, remember that we can revenge." Along with this grasp, they did not forget to remind me of the common bond by which we were united, for each man gave me the secret grip of Ribbonism in a manner that made the joints of my fingers ache for some minutes after.

There was one present, however—the highest in authority—whose actions and demeanour were calm and unexcited; he seemed to labour under no unusual influence whatever, but evinced a serenity so placid and philosophical, that I attributed the silence of the sitting group, and the restraint which curbed in the out-breaking passions of those who stood, entirely to his presence. He was a schoolmaster, who taught his daily school in that chapel, and acted also, on Sunday, in the capacity of clerk to the priest—an excellent and amiable old man, who knew little of his illegal connection, and atrocious conduct.

When the ceremonies of brotherly recognition and friendship were past, the Captain, by which title I will designate the last-mentioned person, stooped, and raising a jar of whiskey on the corner of the altar, held a wine glass to its neck, which he filled, and with a calm nod handed it to me to drink. I shrunk back, with an instinctive horror, at the profaneness of such an act, in the house, and on the altar of God, and peremptorily refused to taste the proffered draught. He smiled, mildly, at what he considered my superstition, and added quietly, and in a low voice, "You'll be wantin' it, I'm thinkin', afther the wettin' you got?"—"Wet or dry," said I—"Stop, man" he replied in the same tone—"spake lower; but why wouldnt you take the whiskey? Sure there's as holy people to the fore as you—didn't they all take it?"—an' I wish we may never do worse than dhrink a harmless glass of whiskey, to keep the could out, any way." "Well," said I, "I'll just trust to God, and the consequences, for the could, Paddy, ma bouchal; but a blessed dhrap ov it wo'n't be crossin' my lips, avick; so no more gothar about it—dhrink it yerself, if you like; may-be you want it as much as I do—wherein I've the pattern of a good big-coat upon me, so thick, yer sowl, that if it was rainin' bullocks, a dhrap wouldn't get undher the nap ov it." He gave me a calm, but keen glance, as I spoke. "Well, Jim," said he, "it's a good comrade you've got for the weather that's in it—but in the mane time, to set you a decent pattern, I'll just take this myself,"—saying which, with the jar still upon its side, and the fore-finger of his left hand in its neck, he swallowed the spirits. "It's the first I dhrank to-night," he added, "nor would I dhrink it now, only to shew you that I've heart and sperrit to do a thing that we're all bound and sworn to, when the proper time comes"—saying which, he laid down the glass, and turned up the jar, with much coolness, upon the altar.

During this conversation, those who had been summoned to this mysterious meeting were pouring in fast; and as each person approached the altar, he received from one to two or three large glasses of whiskey, according as he chose to limit himself—and, to do them justice, there were not a few of those present, who, in despite of their own desire, and the Captain's express invitation, refused to taste it in the

house of God's worship. Such, however, as were scrupulous, he afterwards recommended to take it on the outside of the chapel door, which they did—as by that means, the sacrifice of the act was supposed to be evaded.

About one o'clock they were all assembled except six—at least so the Captain, on looking at a written paper, asserted. "Now, boys," said he, in the same low voice, "we are all present except the traitors, whose names I am goin' to read to you; not that we are to count them as traitors, till we know whether or not it was in their power to come; any how, the night is terrible—but, boys, you're to know, that neither fire nor water is to prevent ye, when duly summonsed to attend a meeting—particularly whin the summons is widout a name, as you have been tould that there is always something of consequence to be done thin." He then read out the names of those who were absent, in order that the real cause of their absence might be ascertained—declaring, that they would be dealt with accordingly. After this he went, and with his usual caution shut and bolted the door, and having put the key in his pocket, he ascended the steps of the altar, and for some time traversed the little platform from which the priest usually addresses the congregation.

Until this night I never contemplated the man's countenance with any particular interest, but as he walked the platform, I had an opportunity of observing him more closely. He was a little man, apparently not thirty; and on a first view seemed to have nothing remarkable either in his dress or features. I, however, was not the only person whose eye was riveted upon him at that moment; in fact every one present observed him with equal interest, for hitherto he had kept the object of the meeting perfectly secret, and of course we all felt anxious to know it. It was while he traversed this platform that I scrutinized his features with a hope, if possible, to glean from them some indication of what was passing within; I could, however, mark but little, and that little was at first rather from the intelligence which seemed to subsist between him and those whom I have already mentioned as standing against the altar, than from any indications of his own; their gleaming eyes were fixed upon him with an intensity of savage and demon-like hope,

which blazed out in flashes of malignant triumph, as upon turning, he threw a cool but rapid glance at them, to intimate the progress he was making in the subject to which he devoted the undivided energies of his mind. But in the course of this meditation, I could observe on one or two occasions a dark shade come over his countenance that contracted his brow into a deep furrow, and it was then, for the first time, that I saw the satanic expression of which his face, by a very slight motion of its muscles, was capable; his hands, during this silence, closed and opened convulsively; his eyes shot out two or three baleful glances, first to his confederates, and afterwards vacantly into the deep gloom of the lower part of the chapel; his teeth ground against each other, like those of a man whose revenge burns to reach a distant enemy, and finally, after having wound himself up to a certain determination, his features relaxed into their original calm and undisturbed expression.

At this moment a loud laugh, having something supernatural in it, rang out wildly from the darkness of the chapel; he stopped, and put-

ting his open hand over his brows, peered down into the gloom, and said calmly in Irish, *be dhu hust ne wuth anam inh*—"hold your tongue, it is not yet the time."—Every eye was now directed to the same spot, but, in consequence of its distance from the dim light on the altar, none could perceive the object from which the laugh proceeded. It was by this time, near two o'clock in the morning.

He now stood for a few moments on the platform, and his chest heaved with a depth of anxiety equal to the difficulty of the design he wished to accomplish; "brothers," said he, "for we are all brothers—sworn upon all that's sacred an' holy, to obey whatever them that's over us, maning among ourselves, wishes us to do—are you now ready, in the name of God, upon whose althar I stand, to fulfil yer oath?"

The words were scarcely uttered, when those who had stood beside the altar during the night, sprung from their places, and descending its steps rapidly, turned round, and raising their arms exclaimed, "By all that's sacred an' holy we're willin'."

In the mean time, those who sat upon the steps of the altar, instantly rose, and following the example of those who had just spoken, exclaimed after them, "to be sure—by all that's sacred an' holy we're willin'."

"Now boys," said the Captain, "ar'nt yees big fools for your pains? an' one of ye's doesn't know what I mane."

"You're our Captain," said one of those who had stood at the altar—"an' has yer ordhers from higher quarthers, of course whatever ye command upon us we're bound to obey you in."

"Well," said he, smiling, "I only wanted to thry ye's an' by the oath ye's took, there's not a Captain in the county has as good a right to be proud of his min as I have—well ye's won't rue it, may be, when the right time comes; and for that same rason every one of ye's must have a glass from the jar; thim that won't dhrink it in the chapel can dhrink it widout; an' here goes to open the door for them"—he then distributed another large glass to every man who would accept it, and brought the jar afterwards to the chapel door, to satisfy the scruples of those who would not drink within. When this was performed, and all duly excited, he proceeded:

"Now, brothers, you are solemnly sworn to obey me, an' I'm sure there's no thraithlur here that id parjurie himself for a trifle, any how, but I'm sworn to obey them that's above me—manin' still among ourselves—an' to shew you that I don't scribble to do it, here goes"—he then turned round, and taking the Missal between his hands, placed it upon the holy altar. Hitherto, every word was uttered in a low precautionary tone; but on grasping the book, he again turned round, and looking upon his confederates with the same satanic expression which marked his countenance before, exclaimed in a voice of deep determination;

"By this sacred an' holy book of God, I will perform the action which we have met this night to accomplish, be that what it may—an' this I swear upon God's book, an' God's altar!" At this moment the candle which burned before him went suddenly out, and the chapel was wrapped in pitchy darkness; the sound as if of rushing wings fell upon our ears, and fifty voices dwelt upon the last words of his oath, with wild and supernatural tones that seemed to echo and to mock what he had

sworn. There was a pause, and an exclamation of horror from all present, but the Captain was too cool and steady to be disconcerted; he immediately groped about until he got the candle, and proceeding calmly to a remote corner of the chapel, took up a half-burned turf which lay there, and after some trouble, succeeded in lighting it again. He then explained what had taken place; which indeed was easily done, as the candle happened to be extinguished by a pigeon which sat exactly above it. The chapel, I should have observed, was at this time, like many country chapels, unfinished inside, and the pigeons of a neighbouring dove-cote, had built nests among the rafters of the uncalled roof, which circumstance also explained the rushing of the wings, for the birds had been affrighted by the sudden loudness of the noise. The mocking voices were nothing but the echoes, rendered naturally more awful by the scene, the mysterious object of the meeting, and the solemn hour of the night.

When the candle was again lighted, and these startling circumstances accounted for, the persons whose vengeance had been deepening more and more during the night, rushed to the altar in a body, where each in a voice trembling with passionate eagerness, repeated the oath, and as every word was pronounced, the same echoes heightened the wildness of the horrible ceremony, by their long and unearthly tones. The countenances of these human tigers were livid with suppressed rage—their knit brows, compressed lips, and kindled eyes, fell under the dim light of the taper, with an expression calculated to sicken any heart not absolutely diabolical.

As soon as this dreadful rite was completed, we were again startled by several loud bursts of laughter, which proceeded from the lower darkness of the chapel, and the captain on hearing them, turned to the place, and reflecting for a moment, said in Irish, “*gutso nish, awohelhee*”—come hither now, boys. A rush immediately took place from the corner in which they had secreted themselves all the night—and seven men appeared, whom we instantly recognized as brothers and cousins of certain persons who had been convicted some time before, for breaking into the house of an honest poor man in the neighbourhood, from whom, after having treated him with barbarous violence, they took away such fire arms as he kept for his own protection.

It was evidently not the captain's intention to have produced these persons until the oath should have been generally taken, but the exulting mirth with which they enjoyed the success of his scheme betrayed them, and put him to the necessity of bringing them forward somewhat before the concerted moment.

The scene which now took place was beyond all power of description; peals of wild fiend-like yells rang through the chapel, as the party which stood on the altar, and that which had crouched in the darkness met; wringing of hands, leaping in triumph, striking of sticks and fire arms against the ground and the altar itself, dancing and cracking of fingers, marked the triumph of some hellish propensity. Even the captain for a time was unable to restrain their fury; but at length he mounted the platform before the altar once more, and with a stamp of his foot, recalled their attention to himself and the matter in hand.

“Boys,” said he, “enough of this, and too

much; an' well for us it is that the chapel is in a lonely place, or our foolish noise might do us no good—let them that swore so manfully just now, stand a one side, till the rest kiss the book one by one.”

The proceedings, however, had by this time taken too alarming a shape, for even the captain to compel them to a blindfold oath; the first man he called flatly refused to swear, until he should first hear the nature of the service that was required. This was echoed by the remainder, who taking courage from the firmness of this person, declared generally, that until they first knew the business they were to execute, none of them should take the oath. The captain's lip quivered slightly, and his brow once more knit with the same hellish expression, which I have remarked gave him so much the appearance of an embodied fiend; but this speedily passed away, and was succeeded by a malignant sneer, in which lurked, if there ever did in a sneer, “a laughing devil,” calmly, determinedly, atrocious.

“It wasn't worth yer whiles to refuse the oath,” said he, mildly, “for the thruth is, I had next to nothing for ye's to do—not a hand, maybe, would have to *rise*, only just to look on, an', if any resistance would be made, to shew yourselves; yer numbers would soon make them see that resistance would be no use whatever in the present case. At all events the oath of *secrecy* must be taken, or woe be to him that will refuse *that*, he wont know the day, the hour, nor the minute, when he'll be made a spatch-cock ov.” He then turned round, and placing his right hand on the Missal, swore “in the presence of God, and before his holy altar, that whatever might take place that night he would keep secret, from man or mortal, except it was the holy priest on his dying day, and that neither bribery, nor imprisonment, nor death, would wring it from his heart;” having done this, he struck the book violently, as if to confirm the energy with which he swore, and then calmly descending the steps, stood with a serene countenance, like a man conscious of having performed a good action. As this oath did not pledge those who refused to take the other to the perpetration of any specific crime, it was readily taken by all present; preparations were then made to execute what was intended; the half-burned turf was placed in a little pot—another glass of whiskey was distributed, and the door being locked by the captain, who kept the key as parish master and clerk, the crowd departed silently from the chapel.

(To be concluded in our next.)

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of his Life. By Thomas Moore, in 2 vols. vol. 1. 4to. pp. 670.—London, Murray, 1830.

WHAT an antithetical mind!—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay! Such is Lord Byron's recorded judgment of Robert Burns, a judgment in our opinion eminently just and true, and such we hesitate not to say, is very nearly a transcript of the impressions of his Lordship's own character and mind, with which we rise from the perusal of his life and writings, to some of which that

never have reached, and that now never can reach the public eye, we have had opportunities of access, as well as to the volume now before the world. In forming our estimate of Lord Byron, there are strong feelings of scorn and abhorrence of the moral character of the man, mingled with our intense admiration of his transcendent poetical genius. We are the more anxious not to mince this matter, because we think a very false unhealthy tone has been adopted on the subject, by many eminent writers in these latter days, and especially in the case of the very individual whom Lord Byron, as above related, judged so hardly yet so truly, before his mind was warped and fallen from its high estate. By some extraordinary obliquity of moral vision, genius has come to be viewed as an extenuation or excuse of palpable delinquency, and those who felt disposed to censure vice as an offence against God and man, not to be palliated on the plea of superior mental powers, have been regarded somewhat as dull wooden-hearted moralists, incapable of estimating the strength of temptation to which men of more lively sensibilities are exposed, or of appreciating the motives which influence the conduct of men, placed far above themselves in the scale of intellectual being. Against all this, we enter our protest. The faculties of man are two-fold, sensual and intellectual. The former, as we remember to have read in Sallust, he shares with the brute animals, the latter is common to him with the deity. To which of the two classes genius belongs, we can have no difficulty in deciding, and if the quick general perception which it confers, sharpens the action even of the lower senses, a proposition which we do not feel ourselves called upon to combat, it is certain, that by adding still greater strength to the rational quickening spirit of man, it establishes the sovereignty of the subtler essence over the grosser part of human nature, in a manner more marked and effectual, than in ordinary characters, and renders the submission of the soul to the senses, in a man of genius, if possible more inexcusable than in any other. If this be not so, if, as we find, those who affect to applaud it most in modern times, frequently maintaining—genius do really tend to disable a man from resisting the impulses of his animal nature, although these impulses be clearly seen to be criminal and pernicious, then is genius a base and grovelling thing, an odious and destructive illusion of the lying spirit, and not, as we believe it, an emanation from the Deity, ennobling and purifying as with seraphic fire, the heart and mind it touches and kindles.

It may be said, however, that we are not warranted in prying into the private recesses of a man's life, or ‘drawing his frailties from their dread abode,’ to gratify the malignant curiosity of an unfeeling world. To a certain extent this is quite true. If a man in his public conduct, or in his published works, has given ‘none occasion of offence,’ then, whatever his personal deficiencies may be, the correction of them ought to be as private as their existence is little known; but public faults require public animadversion, and in any case, a biographer has, in our opinion, no latitude of choice, he must either make up his mind to extenuate nothing, or if friendship or any other cause indispose him to this line of conduct, the only remaining procedure consistent with his honesty and duty, is to decline the task altogether. If partial or coloured statements be imposed upon us for the